

Telecoms package - Users' Rights and E-Privacy Report
Separating the facts from the fiction.

1) How will I benefit from the Users' Rights and e-privacy reform parts of the telecoms reform package?

Consumers will have much clearer mobile phone contracts to ensure they are aware of exactly what they are signing up to. Price plans and information will be clearer. Consumers will be told about any restrictions to particular services, such as Skype, on their handset before agreeing to take out a contract.

Consumers will be informed of any costs of subsidised handsets should they terminate their contracts early.

2) How long will communications contracts be?

Contracts will be a maximum of 24 months to avoid consumers being locked into long contracts. This will encourage operators to innovate, offer competitive services, and keep their prices down to retain their customer base.

3) But why should free laptop offers be banned?

Three year broadband contracts offering a free laptop will be affected. Consumer organisations consider that such long tie-ins stop consumers from accessing better offers as they become available in a very volatile and fast moving business.

4) How long will it take if I want to keep my phone number when switching networks?

The proposals will mean that number portability will take place in one working day. This process can currently take up to 30 days or more in some EU countries. Research shows that it is technically possible to carry out number porting in one day. There will be an exception for cases of slamming or miss-selling (when a customer is switched without their consent).

5) What other new information will I receive?

ISPs will need to make the level of service and speed of service (in case of the need to prioritise certain forms of traffic which would cause a slowing of traffic) clear to consumers in their contracts.

6) What will happen if my Internet Service Provider loses some of my personal data, such as my online banking details?

If there is a serious breach of data, such as this, it will be mandatory to inform consumers.

7) What are the benefits for disabled users?

Disabled users will benefit from equivalent access to communications and special terminal equipment as non-disabled people.

8) Will I be banned from the Internet if I am caught downloading illegal copyright material from the Internet, such as films and music?

No. The reports that the proposals are going to lead to this are scaremongering. The legislation does not propose this.

9) What has caused all this scaremongering?

France is considering a highly controversial law which will mean that if French citizens are caught downloading illegal content, such as copyright films and music, three times they will be disconnected from the Internet. This is called the "Three Strikes and You're Out" rule. This would mean that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) would have to monitor internet traffic. The telecoms package has been attacked by false statements that it would adopt a similar "Three Strikes and You're Out" approach.

10) So what does the Users' Rights report proposals say in relation to copyright?

National authorities would, if appropriate, be able to produce generic, standardised information, which would be sent to all customers. This public interest information could cover a range of issues, including copyright, child pornography, viruses, and risks to attacks for personal security. There will be no targeting of individual customers for any particular activity and there will be no identification, spying or surveillance of any specific individuals. There is also a provision enabling national authorities to promote appropriate cooperation between ISPs and rightholders regarding lawful content.

11) What will happen if I illegally download copyright material after this legislation comes into force? Is there any way this legislation could lead to me being banned from the Internet?

There will be no change to the current situation, which means that it is up to Member States to deal with copyright issues according to their national law.

12) I am very interested in copyright and Intellectual Property. Will there be a more detailed dossier covering these issues?

Yes, the upcoming Creative Content Online consultation will explore Intellectual Property Rights in more detail.